



Expert Roundtable Predicts AI's Role in Aesthetics

Since its formal introduction in November 2022, AI and AI chatbots have transformed communication and information access for over 500 million users. Professionals across sectors are tapping into AI's capabilities. In the spheres of plastic surgery and dermatology, the conversation around AI has reached a crescendo. Traditionally, medical aesthetic practices and medspas based their success on direct patient interactions. Yet, with AI's ascent, chatbots and other AI apps are working to attract potential patients, optimizing appointment scheduling, answering frequently asked questions, offering post-operative care guidelines, and other functions intended to enhance the patient journey. Industry manufacturers are leveraging AI to amplify their marketing strategies, manufacturing processes, and clinical research.

To gauge the sentiments of the medical aesthetic fraternity on this topic, *Aesthetic Insights* consulted with a diverse panel of experts, from AI solution architects to marketing executives, and a physician curious yet cautious about AI's potential. Their opinions provide a compelling snapshot of the developing role of AI in aesthetic medicine.

- Randi Boyette, CEO of Spark Medical Marketing (Boca Raton, Fla.);
- Gregory A. Buford, M.D., F.A.C.S., a plastic surgeon in Denver, Colo.;
- Alice H. Chang, CEO of Perfect Corp. (New Taipei City, Taiwan), developer of AI Skin Analysis;
- John Ferris, Vice President of Marketing at BTL Aesthetics (Marlborough, Mass.);
- Cameron Hemphill, CEO and Founder of Growth99 (Salt Lake City, Utah), an AI application development company; and,
- Philip J. Miller, M.D., F.A.C.S., a New York City-based plastic surgeon and AI chatbot developer.

What is the role of AI / AI chatbots in aesthetics and dermatology?

John Ferris: AI is surrounding our industry in various ways — from the tools physicians use to diagnose and treat patients to how manufacturers been integrating AI in their products to help providers deliver optimal outcomes. Within aesthetics, we see emerging AI-based products that differentiate between benign and malignant skin cancers; other tools can recommend skin services to patients and doctors. AI algorithms analyze vast amounts of data from various sources, including patient histories, skin types, and environmental factors, to create personalized treatment plans for each patient. We have found simple AI chatbots on providers' websites for years, but recently providers and manufacturers moved beyond chatbots that answer simple questions. Newer AI apps converse with patients and can even provide patient consultations. With the growing popularity of ChatGPT, AI is now a top marketing buzzword. For example, I recently drove across the San Francisco Bay Bridge and all but one billboard used the word AI in its messaging. However, while advertising companies use sophisticated AI formulas for predictive analytics, the services themselves don't have creativity or a soul.

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Randi Boyette, MBA



Alice H. Chang: In the dermatology arena, AI helps to build a more tailored consumer skincare experience. Integrating “smart” skin technology helps users detect and analyze skin concerns, guide them in their purchasing decisions via tailored product recommendations, and allows them to take a more proactive approach to their skin health. These innovations will continue to reshape the future of cosmetic procedures by allowing professionals to boost client confidence and establish more trusted relationships. The ease-of-use and efficacy associated with our diagnostic solution and other such products are sure to deliver a more satisfying and fulfilling client journey, one that instills confidence and builds stronger connections.

Randi Boyette: Any type of business can use AI, but in the aesthetic industry, it is useful for responding to consumers' many questions about treatments. AI chatbots can provide answers in an automated but conversational fashion. Also, the enormous popularity of texting has changed how practices and medspas communicate with patients. Many people, especially younger age groups, don't really feel like talking on the phone with office staff. The practical response to this is to employ a conversational AI robot or chatbot, eliminating the need for them to have to talk to a live person. They can connect with a practice's AI chatbot and start messaging their questions. For instance, say the prospective patient texts "What does this treatment feel like?" The chatbot is programmed to explain what the treatment feels like. It has an answer for every question that the consumer can put out there, which streamlines getting people in the door.

Cameron Hemphill: When examining AI's role in the healthcare sector, virtual consults should be considered as a potent tool for practitioners. I don't mean a Zoom session or a telehealth call. I mean a true virtual consultation, in which the practice owner gets a lead or receives a patient's case file, investigates, and understands what their problem is and how to treat it. It is an AI-driven system that provides a solution without engagement. Therefore, it speeds up the sales time and resolves questions that the patient has. In a clinical context, truly virtual consultations can swiftly and methodically analyze patient symptoms, help pinpoint a diagnosis, recommend pertinent diagnostic tests, and propose evidence-based therapeutic interventions, finishing with a clinical encounter note. Such a tool can address multiple challenges inherent in the current healthcare infrastructure. AI virtual consults have the potential to optimize the clinical workflow of physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants, and lead to a better utilization of healthcare resources and potentially mitigating associated costs.

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Alice H. Chang



Why is it important for aesthetic practitioners to consider using AI in their clinical practices?

Ms. Chang: The simple answer is that AI is here to stay. It's especially important for physicians and device manufacturers to lean into the future of innovation and find unique ways to integrate AI into their business strategies to support the client experience. Professionals that leverage AI in their medical solutions will be ahead of the curve than those who don't. In the dermatology space, for example, we are long overdue for innovative solutions, as professionals have relied on expensive and clunky machinery to provide screening results in the exam room. AI is now elevating and improving that process, making it more accessible and convenient to track and analyze skin health.

Gregory A. Buford, M.D., F.A.C.S.: I'm watching the AI phenomenon grow and see where it might be going. AI is to be used for predictive modeling and predicted treatments — skin rejuvenation and body contouring using algorithms to identify optimum treatment settings, number of treatments, and any other variables that in the past were human determined but will now be determined by an algorithm. AI will take some of the thinking out of what we do in the treatment room, but I don't think it'll be only a robot doing the treating. Artificial intelligence is going to play a huge role not only in high-level practices like my own, but also in the medspa arena, where it will effectively take out the middleman. Someone enters a medspa and they say they want to look younger. They sit down in front of an AI app that scans their face, maps them and responds — well, you look a little older because your skin is dry, and you have some fine wrinkling and volume loss. AI, not a human, comes up with a complete treatment plan based on a large sample size of similarly diagnosed patients. Eventually, in that way, AI may not only help us guide the treatments, but may also help perform the treatments.

Philip J. Miller, M.D., F.A.C.S.: I look at it with an even broader perspective. There's such a huge revolution in so many fields right now. These advances, from artificial virtual reality, or augmented reality, to material sciences, artificial intelligence, and finance, are exploding in parallel. And when you combine them, there's an exponential effect, a synergy, and I think we're seeing that particularly in artificial intelligence. Why is it so important for the aesthetic practitioner to consider AI? What is the benefit for them? Well, AI is occurring everywhere. The physician doesn't quite understand what all this AI synergy means, but they ask, how can I use it? First, there's the ability to communicate with their patients quickly in your voice. AI can analyze the practice's data, which might be in an Excel spreadsheet, and not only automatically summarize the data but offer insight into it. AI spreads across all the applications that a business might use daily.

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Explain the perceived fear and potential downsides of AI technology.

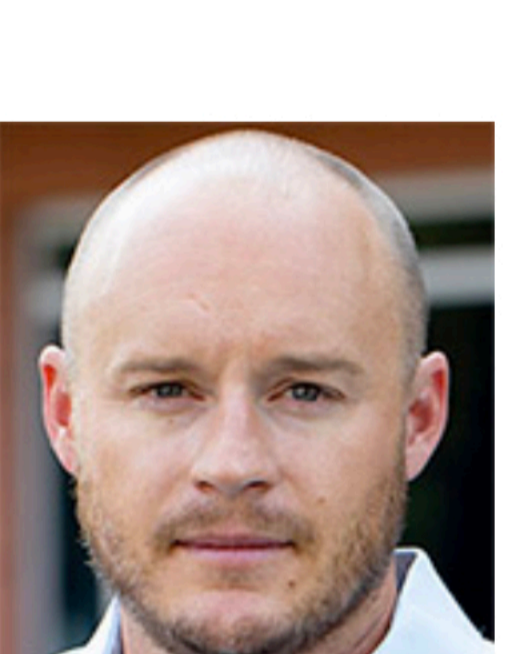
Mr. Ferris: Simply put, systemic biases provide incorrect results. Companies are working on AI solutions to help consumers “try on” aesthetic procedures prior to undergoing actual treatment. From a provider and manufacturer perspective, this sets up potential false expectations. Also, marketing is about differentiating your products and services from your competitors. AI uses existing data to make recommendations. Given that we live in a copycat industry, AI will make very similar recommendations for various campaigns. If providers and the industry cannot prompt AI with key differentiators, then we will collectively commoditize products and services. Another downside is the problematic nature of securing and protecting data, as well as the potential release of sensitive consumer and / or provider information into the public domain.

Dr. Buford: It's normal for people to push back against something that's new and represents fundamental change. The news media hype exacerbates that fear of job loss and other concerns, real or imagined. There may be job losses, not only among entry-level people but white-collar workers. It seems like that's a bit of a red herring, though. Take the higher end, high-level thinker, such as an electronic engineer. I believe a person will need to understand and adopt AI as a tool that helps realize his or her engineering goals. In jobs that require more artistry, more out-of-the-box thinking, where you're not using paradigms, where you're not doing things the same way every time, how creative can AI be?

Dr. Miller: Use AI judiciously, prudently, and with some reservation. It's a resource no different from Google. And Google can't confirm the authenticity of the information it retrieves from a search. The same goes for ChatGPT. I want confirmation. So, while I may get a quick answer from an AI prompt, I'm going to check two or three or four different sources before I agree or finally recognize the search result is accurate. ChatGPT is fallible. You can ask ChatGPT a question and get back three conclusions in a row that are absolutely acceptable and true. You would be subject to believe a fourth conclusion because the first three were accurate or well-known, and you might actually accept the fourth one as well. But, what if the fourth one is total conjecture, in which the reference is to an article that was never actually published? Skepticism, due diligence, and pushback are necessary in such a scenario.

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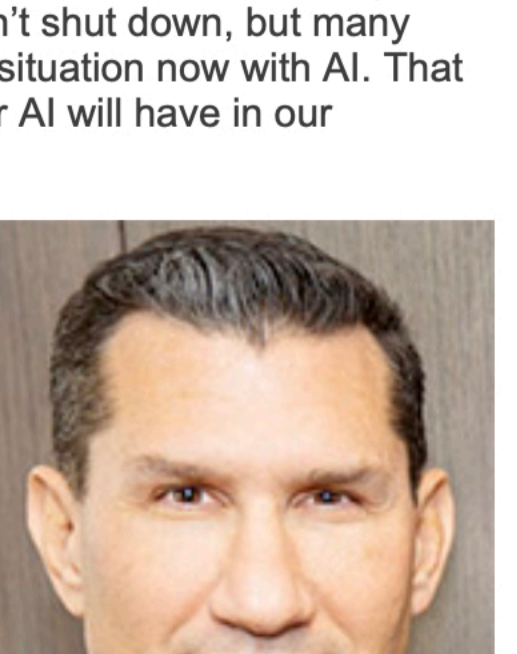
Mr. Hemphill: Pushback is already very much taking place. Early adopters are driving through the technology, understanding it, and helping to shape it. It will push others into AI. The more that a business, an aesthetic practice, an end-user, and the world at large adopt AI, the more we're going to see people that want to push back. Some people will file complaints. It's just a matter of change and a matter of time. Despite that inevitability, we're also seeing massive adoption of AI around the world and across our vertical, whether it's the practice owner or the aesthetic patient. Do I think there's why a negative with AI? Yes. It could remove some of the human element too quickly, but that's why it needs to be leveraged in the right way. And so the practice owner will still quickly be the front-facing driver of the practice, with just enough AI technology spread around the business to be useful as leveraging tools.

How can manufacturers and other companies in the aesthetic space integrate AI into their operations, marketing, product development, etc.?

Dr. Miller: Manufacturers are already integrating AI into their operations, their marketing, their R&D, etc. It will affect areas such as design, manufacturing, product testing, clinical trials, and marketing. Across the entire product lifecycle. For example, the result of this could be an acceleration in the number of new fillers that are brought to market. AI could eliminate processes that are sort of iterative and characterized by trial and error. In that way, manufacturers will use AI to determine what is the best formula for a particular problem. And despite potential advantages and cost-savings related to AI, decision-makers in these companies should know we are currently in an “AI bubble.” AI is being overvalued right now, big time. An investment in AI doesn't refer to the legitimacy of AI. The familiar analogy is when the Internet bubble imploded in 2000. That happened because the business world was valuing websites and Internet services at a multiple that was just unheard of, and was ridiculous. So the balloon blew up. The Internet didn't shut down, but many investments in the Internet shriveled. And I would say we're in the same situation now with AI. That fact does not delegitimize the role of AI. Nor does it undermine the power AI will have in our immediate future.

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Philip J. Miller, M.D., F.A.C.S.



How would you characterize AI's path to regulation?

Ms. Boyette: Government regulators are going to get involved at some point. We need to make sure that everything in our business that uses AI is HIPAA compliant. I have to say this to the AI cowboys out there. They are like, oh, let me just connect this patient database to ChatGPT and call it a day. But a lot of things can go wrong with that. Companies, including practices, should hire professionals who understand how to create the boundaries for your AI. There have to be limits and controls on AI and your chatbots, such as teaching it what to say and what not to say. We're training the robot on how to talk to potential patients. The pitfalls are when people don't take the steps to put an expert in place who knows how to strictly enforce HIPAA compliance. The government will come up with new laws and regulations that oversee AI and chatbots. We work with a health agency to help us with AI compliance, and we've been in touch with them regularly to make sure that we're following all the guidelines.

Ms. Chang: This is a digital revolution and the businesses that will thrive are those that find unique ways to integrate and live symbiotically with AI innovation. Our goal as a solution provider is to develop advanced technologies, act responsibly and serve as a true utility to brands and consumers, along with aiding the consumer or client experience. All AI developers need to, like us, continue to pay close attention and adhere to changing regulatory requirements.

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